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DEPARTMENT OF CHINESE AND JAPANESE ART

LOWER CORRIDOR

JAPANESE THEATRICAL COSTUMES WORN IN THE NŌ DRAMA

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NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION.

The following brief indications may be found helpful in the pronunciation of unfamiliar Japanese, Chinese and Sanskrit words.

In Japanese, the vowels are sounded as in Italian or Spanish. Each member of a diphthong or other vowel combination retains its original force, and the important distinction between a long and a short vowel results from duration of utterance rather than from any change in sound. The consonants are pronounced approximately as in English. G is hard as in "give", and double consonants should be pronounced really double, as in "shot-tower" or "cock-crow". There is practically no tonic accent, though a similar effect is produced by the prolongation of the long vowels and by the enunciation of double consonants.

In Chinese, according to Wade's system of transliteration, a is usually long as in "father"; e short as in "yet"; ê, much like the vowel sound in the German "schön", except before n, when it is like the vowel sound in "sun"; i is long as in "machine", except before n, when it is short as in "pin"; o not quite so broad as the "aw" in "saw"; u like the vowel sound in "too", except before n, when it resembles the vowel sound in "look"; ü like the French "u" in "du"; ŭ, something like the vowel sound in the first syllable of "surround"; ou, something like the vowel sound in "foe"; ai as in "aisle"; ei like the vowel sound in "say"; in other vowel combinations each letter retains its original force; ch is hard as in "church"; j is soft like the "s" in "vision"; hs approximately like "sh" in English. The reversed comma in T'ang, Ch'an and other words indicates a gentle aspirate.

In Sanskrit, the vowels are pronounced as in Italian or Spanish; ś and ṣ are soft, -- something like sh in English; ḍ and ṭ are pure lingual consonants, -- not dental as in English; ṇ is also a pure lingual consonant, -- not nasal; th and dh are pronounced like the underlined letters in the phrases "hit hard" and "hard hit" respectively.

A masked actor impersonating the principal female rôle in the Nō-dance called Fuji Taiko. This photograph shows the plain, wooden construction of the stage, the conventionalized pine tree painted on the back wall and, at the left, one end of the covered gallery along which the performers make their entries. The actor is standing on that portion of the stage which is usually reserved for the leading character in a play.

Costumes Worn in the Japanese Classic Drama.

These costumes have been acquired partly by purchase and partly by the generous gift of Dr. W. S. Bigelow. They are exhibited primarily as textiles; and although it is quite legitimate to regard them from that point of view alone or simply as illustrations of ways in which a great variety of colors and designs may be applied to the embellishment of woven fabrics, nevertheless it is clear that, since such garments were devised for specific purposes, they cannot be truly appreciated without the help of at least some slight knowledge of the conditions under which they were used. It is hoped, therefore, that the following brief account of the Japanese Classic Drama may serve to suggest in a measure the environment of which these actors' costumes are a partial but still important result.

Throughout the whole range of artistic activity in Japan, it would probably be impossible to find any manifestation more thoroughly native, - less affected, that is, by foreign influences, - than the form of theatrical entertainment known to the Japanese

themselves as the No or No-gaku, - a name which is usually, if not very aptly, paraphrased in English by the term No-dance. There is, indeed, in these performances very little of what we should ordinarily call dancing, and they might more appropriately be described as Lyric Dramas, in spite of the fact that their construction and appeal are, on the whole, narrative rather than dramatic. But the term No-dance, besides being firmly, though perhaps erroneously, fixed as the English equivalent of No-gaku, has at least the advantage of indicating the sources from which the Classic Drama was derived.

The No-dances, then, make their first appearance in history during the latter half of the 14th century, and although they must have been developed to some extent in the course of the following one hundred and fifty years, there is every reason to believe that they were originally produced in substantially the same forms and under practically the same conditions that have survived until the present day. From the time of their origin as organized performances until the close of the 15th century, their repertoire was rapidly increased; but although many No-plays were undoubtedly written in later periods, the Classic repertoire of the No-stage is made up entirely of dramas composed prior to the beginning of the 16th century.

As far as historical data are concerned, there are few indications as to what the No-dance really was during its formative period; but we can at least form a fairly clear idea of the various allied entertainments which preceded it and constituted, probably, the materials of which it was compounded. In the semi-religious narratives and hero-tales sung or recited by minstrels; in the solemn performance of the Kagura, - a dance associated with the ceremonies of the indigenous Shinto religion; in the acrobatic feats and musical accompaniment of the Den-gaku or Country Dance; and in the more obviously comic antics of the Saru-gaku or Monkey Dance; - in all these, and in their own literary talents, the highly educated Buddhist priests of the 14th century must have found ample nourishment for the roots of the No-dance. The taste for lyric and dramatic narration was already well established; the raised platform or stage was taken from the Kagura; the bridge-like gallery along which the dancers of the Den-gaku came on the scene was appropriated; the poetic text with its musical setting was supplied by the Buddhist priests, and somewhat later, perhaps, the generally tragic tone of the No-plays themselves was relieved by spoken interludes called Kyogen or Farces, possibly derived from the comedy of the Monkey-dance.

Whether the early development of the No was really accomplished in the manner suggested above can only be surmised; but the immediate result of that development can be seen, practically unchanged, in Japan at the present day. The setting of these dramas is remarkable for its simplicity. The stage is a raised platform about 18 feet square, open on three sides and provided with a roof supported on four pillars. This roof is a survival from the time when the No was performed out of doors, and although the plays are now given within a building, the stage-roof is still preserved. Projecting diagonally from the back, left hand corner of the stage, and connecting the latter with the "green-room", is a narrow covered gallery on which the actors make their entrances; and at the opposite corner is a small doorway through which the chorus and orchestra come on and, under certain circumstances, exits are made by the actors. Between these points, and connecting overhead with the roof, runs the back-wall of the stage, on which is painted a highly conventionalized picture of a pine tree, - the only decoration of the kind sanctioned by tradition. The whole of this construction is of plain, unstained wood, and the severely simple effect thus produced is intensified by the absence of all scenery or other stage setting except occasionally a few unobtrusive

properties, and by the subdued lighting of the theatre. Surrounding the stage on three sides sit the quietly dressed spectators, and on the stage itself, along the back and right hand margin respectively, sit the orchestra of flute and drum players and the chorus with their leader, - all in perfect keeping with the serious atmosphere of the occasion. Into these almost austere surroundings come the gorgeously dressed actors, each wearing the beautifully carved wooden mask that may be demanded by his part, and carrying a special form of fan decorated with colors and gold. From the moment of his appearance at the further end of the covered gallery leading to the stage, until his exit, the actor is playing his rôle, and with every movement or attitude of his body the otherwise gently diffused light is caught and intensified in the folds of his brilliant dress as to produce rich color effects which contrast vividly with the other more sombre appointments of the play. Indeed these costumes, like all works of art successfully designed for particular uses, are seen to the best advantage only among the surroundings for which they were intended. The dramas themselves, - acted exclusively by men - are, like their setting, extremely simple in construction. They deal, for the most part, with straight-forward narratives which, disregarding as they do the unities of time, place and action, and embodying more or less religious

instruction of Buddhist origin, offer comparatively little scope for purely dramatic effects. The semi-metrical dialogue, sustained by actors and chorus to the accompaniment of instrumental music, is partly sung, partly chanted or intoned, and although it is sometimes naïve, it is always dignified and, as a rule, truly poetic. All obvious simplicity of presentation is, however, more than offset by intricacies of literary and histrionic technique which none but a devotee of the Classic Drama is able fully to appreciate. Every performance of a No-dance is, of course, conducted throughout in accordance with the time-honored traditions maintained by any one of the several schools into which this art has long been divided, each school insisting on its own interpretation of the plays, but really differing from its rivals in no essential feature; and every actor, no matter to which school he may belong, must follow absolutely the ancient precedents transmitted to him through many generations of professional ancestors. In all such matters he may exercise no discretion whatsoever; his own personality is of no consequence except in so far as it may help or hinder him in perfecting his command of a rigidly prescribed technique; and he is keenly alive to the fact that if, when on the stage, he should exaggerate a gesture, prolong a pose unduly or make even the slightest

fault in delivery, the majority of his audience, - knowing the part quite as well as he does, - will be entirely aware of his error.

Even from what has already been said, it may be readily inferred that the No-dance has few characteristics that would endear it to the hearts of the general public, and indeed the enjoyment of it must, in the nature of things, always remain a privilege of the highly educated classes. The texts of the plays are so replete with historical references and literary subtleties, that a considerable degree of scholarship is a necessary accompaniment of true appreciation; and since the words, as sung or chanted, are extremely difficult to understand, the auditor must know his libretto practically by heart in order to follow every intricacy of thought and suggestion. Moreover, the No is a time-consuming entertainment; for although a single play may take no more than an hour to enact, it is customary to give several of them in succession, and these, together with the necessary number of Comic Interludes, usually consume the greater part of a day; so that the spectators, gathering for the performance at about nine o'clock in the morning, bring their luncheons with them and do not leave the theatre until the middle of the afternoon.

But such as the No-dance is today, so it has always been; and during more than four centuries it has served to thrill and delight the best minds that Japan has produced, - even as the still greater dramas of the ancient Greek stage, with their choruses, their simple music, their brilliant costumes and their masked actors, enthralled the poets, sages and people of Athens nearly two thousand years ago.

John E. Lodge

Masked actors impersonating the male rôle of Jō and the female rôle of Uba in the Nō-dance called Takasago. This group occupies the right-hand side of the stage.